

Problems handcuff police sex crime unit, say critics

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The recently formed sex crimes unit of the Cleveland Police Department has suffered from internal conflict, poor administration, understaffing and a lack of experienced personnel, according to some critics who question the unit's overall effectiveness.

A major concern is that four detectives left the unit within its first four months, including one considered a top sex crimes investigator. Only one of those who quit has been replaced,

reducing the unit's ranks from 18 to 15.

The unit, formed last September, is understaffed and too overwhelmed with work to respond properly to complaints, police sources who requested anonymity said. They said many of the staff lacked the background and training to conduct sex crimes investigations.

Police sources also said the unit's chief, Lt. Lucie J. Krause, had a rigid management style that left little room for compromise and was a major reason some personnel left the unit.

"I had hopes of it being the best in the nation, but I don't think it's effective," said a policeman who asked not to be identified. The officer is not in the unit, but is familiar with its operations through conversations with current and former members. "I have people calling me saying they can't get anyone from the unit to respond to their complaints and I get (police) from the unit asking me how to proceed in their investigations. The background skill is missing."

Councilman Jeffrey D. Johnson admitted, "There are still some glaring problems with the unit."

Johnson, D-8, was instrumental in having the unit established after the murders of 14-year-old Trina Middleton, of Cleveland Heights, and Gloria Pointer, also 14, of Cleveland. Middleton was raped and Pointer was sexually assaulted. The crimes occurred within three months in 1984.

Before the sex crimes unit was established, coordination was so poor between various police districts that, according to Johnson, "The same rapist could be involved in three separate districts and police wouldn't know it." The newly established unit is notified immediately of all Cleveland sex

crimes and maintains a central computerized file of them.

While even Johnson admits the new system is a vast improvement, he said he considered the unit "half a loaf." He attributed certain problems to ego clashes between Krause and some of those who have left the unit. Three left voluntarily and one was reportedly reassigned.

A major criticism from police sources and Johnson is that the specialized unit, set up to handle all felonious sex crimes against adults and children, does not include some of the city's top sex crime investigators.

"Detective Janice Abernathy should have been on this," said Johnson, adding that Abernathy has an outstanding record for investigating sex crimes. He said if Capt. Richard McIntosh, an expert in the field of child abuse, had been named head of the unit instead of Krause, it would have been a model for the nation.

Krause has had some experience and training in sex crimes, but most of her background has been in vice. Johnson said Krause was chosen over McIntosh primarily because she is a

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copy of Police Chief William T. Hanton, whereas Hanton and McIntosh are known not to see eye-to-eye on many issues. Johnson has been critical of Hanton, who will be replaced as police chief April 1 by Lt. Howard E. Rudolph. Hanton was not available for comment.

McIntosh has more administrative experience than Krause, Johnson said, and has the kind of media savvy the unit needs. Unless the public is adequately informed that a major effort is under way to sensitize how police handle sex-related crimes, victims may still shy away from reporting rapes and child abuse, the councilman said.

The unit was dealt a major blow when Detective Barbara Parker resigned. Parker, like Abernathy, is a highly respected sex crimes expert, whose resignation from the unit perplexed observers since the assignment is considered a plum and ideally suited to her background. Parker attributed her resignation to personal reasons.

Johnson complained that a shroud of secrecy had surrounded the implementation of the sex crimes unit, and City Council had not been informed of the background of the personnel chosen or the criteria used in selection.

The unit also has been criticized for a lack of coordination with social service agencies, such as the Witness-Vic-

tim Service Center, which helps prepare victims of crimes for trial, and the Rape Crisis Center, which counsels rape victims.

"I have heard from agency people that they're concerned about how the unit is alienating itself," said one source familiar with the operations of Witness-Victim and the Rape Crisis Center. "The purpose is not to set up a separate agency. I don't know why the whole idea did not materialize."

One social service employee said Krause might have been reluctant to refer child abuse victims to the Witness-Victim Service Center because she feared "contaminated testimony" in which a child is interviewed so often the original, and often most reliable version, becomes muddled. Before the sex crimes unit was established, prosecutors would frequently refer child abuse victims to Witness-Victim for preliminary interviews. Krause's unit now usually carries out such interviews.

Krause said none of the criticisms of the unit was true. She said her hiring recommendations were based largely on "sensitivity" of the individuals interviewed, and their ability to be trained in sex crimes investigations, not necessarily on prior experience. She denied having personality problems with any of the policemen, saying each of those who left the unit had reasons unrelated to her administrative style.

"I think I'm pretty easy to get along with as long as the job is getting done

the way I want it done," said Krause. She said it was too soon to judge the unit's effectiveness. "I would like to have more people, but with the manpower problems (in the Cleveland Police Department), I don't know how realistic that is. I see things operating more and more smoothly."

She praised the unit for improving interview techniques, thereby reducing the trauma of victims.

Under a pilot project, the sex crimes unit is teaming up with sex abuse experts from the Cuyahoga County Department of Human Services and Cleveland Metropolitan General Hospital to interview child abuse victims. Instead of three interviews by hospital officials, county workers and police, child victims in the 2nd District project undergo a single interview, with representatives from each agency present.

"It used to be a very disjointed process, with everybody working to serve their own mandates without considering the trauma of the child and victim," said Barbara Galloway, supervisor of the sex abuse department of the human services department.

Bradley Weiss, director of the Cleveland Prosecutor Mediation Program, which screens citizens' complaints for a variety of crimes, spoke of the sex crimes unit and Krause in glowing terms.

"I disagree with Jeff (Johnson) on this one," said Weiss. "I think Lucie Krause is terrific. She's committed, she really cares about people and she's

smart and can get things done. The only negative I can give you is what went on before the sex crimes unit came along."

As an example of the insensitivity of some policemen to the crime of rape, he described what he called a "horror story" that occurred last year before the sex crimes unit was formed.

A woman who had been raped came to the mediation office asking for guidance and was given a crime report to fill out and taken to the police district where the crime occurred. Weiss said the police sergeant on duty took the report, "crumpled it and threw it in her face," further humiliating the victim.

Johnson described Krause as sincere and knowledgeable, but lacking the ability "to understand the total picture." He said Hanton and Mayor George V. Voinovich were primarily to blame for inadequacies of the sex crimes unit because they had not made it a major priority.

"I would probably grade her (Krause's) performance as head of the unit a B, but I would give the effectiveness of the unit a C minus," said Johnson.

Most observers say the unit's ultimate effectiveness can be judged only in the courtroom, where the cases are tried. Prosecutors said it was premature to pass judgment.

"I anticipate only good results coming from this unit," said Assistant Cuyahoga County Prosecutor Patricia Anne Gaughan. But she added, "I haven't noticed a difference in any of the cases I've prosecuted."